DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 556 TM 810 438

AUTHOR Dillon, J. T.
TITLE To Question and Not to Question During Discussion.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 40p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (65th, Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques: *Discussion (Teaching Technique): Elementary Secondary Education: *Questioning Techniques: Student Teacher Relationship: Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Question Answer Reciprocity

ABSTRACT

Contrary to widespread pedagogical belief and practice, the teacher's use of questions probably does not facilitate discussion and may actively foil it. This argument proceeds along a series of contrasts between the functions and effects of questions on the one hand and the processes and purposes of discussion on the other. The result is a series of recommendations for practice, generally the reverse of classroom questioning: to use questions as they are not typically used and not to use questions as they are typically used. The first recommendation is to ask questions sparingly, and only when perplexed. The second is not to use questions in ten specified ways at the juncture where a student has finished speaking. The third is to use seven alternatives to questioning. Practiced together, the techniques promise to achieve those ends of discussion for which questions are mistakenly and often fruitlessly put. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED205556

To Question and Not to Question During Discussion

J. T. Dillon

University of California, Riverside

Paper presented at AERA Annual Meeting

Los Angeles, April 13-17, 1981

Session: Discussion as a Curricular Resource

Chair: Joseph Schwab

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

TM 810 438

Note: J. T. Dillon is assistant professor of education, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521. Degrees: BA, MA (history); MA, PhD (educational psychology). Research interest: question-answer processes.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dillon J T

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TO QUESTION AND NOT TO QUESTION DURING DISCUSSION

Abstract

Contrary to widespread pedagogical belief and practice, the teacher's use of questions probably does not facilitate discussion and may actively foil it. This argument proceeds along a series of contrasts between the functions and effects of questions on the one hand and the processes and purposes of discussion on the other. The result is a series of recommendations for practice, generally the reverse of classroom questioning: to use questions as they are not typically used and not to use questions as they are typically used. The first recommendation is to ask questions sparingly, and only when perplexed. The second is not to use questions in ten specified ways at the juncture where a student has finished speaking. The third is to use seven alternatives to questioning. Practiced together, the techniques promise to achieve those ends of discussion for which questions are mistakenly and often fruitlessly put.

TO QUESTION AND NOT TO QUESTION DURING DISCUSSION

The use of questions which is appropriate to discussion is the reverse of typical classroom questioning. In favor of discussion, teachers would choose to use questions as they do not ordinarily do and not to use questions as they ordinarily do. A problem arises in practice when modes of questioning behavior suitable for other classroom interactions are unwittingly pursued during discussion periods. In that case the use of questions promises to foil rather than to facilitate discussion.

This argument proceeds along a series of contrasts and eventuates in a series of recommendations for practice. The functions and effects of questions will be compared against the processes and purposes of discussion. The two can be seen not to go together. Three recommendations follow. The first is to use questions sparingly, and only when perplexed. The second is not to use ten specified questioning behaviors at the juncture where a student has just finished speaking. The third is to use seven alternatives to questioning. Hence, to question and not to question implies not exclusive choice but deliberate conjunction of behaviors.*

---

*An interim agreement over terms is essential. "Questioning" here refers to the act of asking or putting or using questions. It can serve any number of functions (not exclusively those of challenging and interrogating) and can count any number of questions (not exclusively a protracted series). "To question" and "not to question"

---

are infinitive forms of "asking a question" (or of "questioning"). "Questions" refers to interrogative utterances, those which in the main are followed by "answers." All of these terms can well be used differently elsewhere, and indeed a dozen finer distinctions need to be made for the formal analysis of questions, as in logic. Readers of this paper can have in mind whatever familiar event is evoked by such a phrase as: a teacher asks a question and a student gives an answer.

Classroom Questioning

A generalized picture of classroom questioning can be drawn from numerous observational studies in classes variously described as recitation, guided discovery, and Socratic dialogue. Despite other differences among these processes, they appear to be marked by a certain type of verbal interaction, recorded time and again by observers from various perspectives (for a review see Gall, 1970 or Dillon, 1981c).

The picture is of one person in control of the discourse of many. Typically the teacher is found to speak more than any other person and more than all others combined; and the teacher typically speaks in questions. Students speak in answer. Discourse proceeds by a series of exchanges between the teacher and one or one after another individual student (sometimes a chorus). Students rarely speak to one another and rarely ask questions (but always of the teacher). Teacher questions are not put for the sake of discovering the information in answer, as the information is known in all cases to the teacher and in most cases to the student. The pace is fast and the interchange predictable. On the whole, the teacher puts many questions, at a high rate, of a simple type (both cognitive and linguistic). Student responses are brief and simple. Immediately following upon the response the teacher speaks again, noting the answer and putting another question.

This questioning behavior can be seen to serve certain social functions as well as discourse functions (see Mishler, 1975b, 1978; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). In school as without, questioning expresses the differential status of participants and assigns to them

different rights and obligations. In classroom exchanges, the superordinate partner is the teacher; only the teacher has the right to speak at any time, and the rights to determine the topic and to select the speaker. Students are not seen to have a right to contribute to the discourse but speak as directed and permitted by the teacher. Through questioning the teacher initiates and sustains the conversation, specifies its content and controls its direction. The teacher has the right to question; the student the obligation to respond. As questioner, the teacher enjoys the reserved right to speak again following the response, usually exercised by putting another question and thus evoking a further response. When a student permissibly contributes unsolicited information or puts a question the teacher tends to reply with a counter-question, thus regaining control of the exchange.

These pedagogical and sociolinguistic features describe what might be called a question-answer relationship. The interpersonal dynamics peculiar to such a relationship are well within the familiar experience of adults as well as of children, not only in school but in a variety of other circumstances--interviews, interrogations, examinations of all kinds when one is (temporarily) a subordinate for situational purposes and finds oneself in the position of having for one reason or another to answer question after question. Direct experience is supplemented by a range of vicarious experiences such as televised depictions of courtroom cross-examinations, police interrogations, legislative hearings, journalistic and medical interviews. From direct and vicarious experiences in school and out, people know

how to behave in a question-answer relationship and especially know what it is like to be the respondent. They also know it is far better to be in the position of the one who is asking the questions.

For the one answering the questions, the situation ordinarily induces a certain measure of tension, discomfort and unpleasantness. That is particularly the case when the questioning is prolonged and the outcome uncertain, but it remains commonly the case to some degree in all question-answer relationships. The experience will be refused if possible. In everyday conversation adults speak consistently in questions to children but not to one another. In group conversations they will sanction someone who continually asks questions, on the view that such behavior is inappropriate to the process and to the social status of participants. In dyadic conversations, after answering 2-3 questions a speaker will begin to suspect the partner's motive (e.g., "Why do you ask?") and refuse the implied status of respondent (e.g., "Say, who do you think you are, asking all these questions?"). In some situations the respondent's role is elective, as in an opinion poll, yet permission to ask must always first be granted. But if cast of necessity into the respondent's role, a person will have to accept the varying degrees of unease which the experience of answering question after question brings with it.

For children in classrooms as well as for adults in other circumstances, a question-answer relationship fosters in the respondent dependency, passivity, and reactivity (cf. Benjamin, 1974; Susskind, 1969). The respondent takes no initiative and no responsibility for the conversation but participates by giving limited, usually

short and often guarded, answers and then cooperates by awaiting the next question--remaining silent if it is not immediately forthcoming. A respondent who initially elaborates on the answers will usually be ignored or interrupted by a question, as if the contribution were irrelevant or ill-timed, and as if the questioner were saying: "Look, if I want to know what you're thinking, I'll ask you" (Drake, 1972). As a consequence, responses tend to become shorter and shorter as further questions are put. A respondent who attempts to ask a question in turn will ordinarily be met either with a counter-question or some other uncooperative reaction, as if to say: "Look, I'm the one who asks the questions around here, OK?" The situation is defined in such a way that the course of conversation is rightly supposed to be determined by one party, the one who asks the questions; the other party follows along by giving the answers and then awaits the outcome.

The outcome of a question-answer relationship is usually an evaluative and authoritative decision on the part of the questioner. Having for whatever reason asked the presumably necessary questions and having in some inaccessible way assessed the answers, the questioner accords or withholds favorable items such as a job, a license, a diagnosis, a solution, a medal, a piece of advice, praise, and so forth. In favor of deciding the outcome, questioner and respondent enter (not always willingly) this well-defined relationship. The respondent's role involves enduring a certain amount of unease; withholding of initiative and withdrawing from responsibility; answering when asked and as asked; remaining otherwise cooperatively silent and expectant and receptive. Inside classrooms as without,

the respondent relies on the questioner to move the process along, to evaluate it and then to produce the outcome. For students in a question-answer class the immediate outcome is authoritative knowledge, or "truth," of a factual or conventional type.

These are the exchanges, functions, behaviors, roles, experiences and outcomes implicated in characteristic classroom questioning. They are in various respects normal and appropriate in that they follow from the use of questions and in that questions may effectively serve to promote given classroom processes in favor of given educational purposes. But questioning can be seen at a glance not conducive to the processes and purposes of discussion.

Classroom Discussion

The use of questions during discussion depends on how one views the functions and effects of questions on the one hand and on the other the processes and purposes of discussion. Teachers who are favorably disposed to discussion are likely to favor teacher-student interaction in general, and many of their classes probably involve question-answer exchanges. These teachers may be so well practiced in questioning and their students so well schooled in question-answer interactions (from that class and others at that time and over the years), that the use of questions may appear to be the normal and indeed natural way to get discussion going, especially in the belief that questions stimulate expression of student thought. The very familiarity of all participants with teacher questions makes them easy to use but all the more inappropriate to use, for they are likely to foil rather than to facilitate discussion. A special kind of

questioning behavior is required for discussion: in short, the opposite of familiar use of questions.

What are the purposes and processes of discussion? Here there is no need to be stipulative or definitive but only to identify generalities which will encompass a variety of conceptions of discussion. For convenience of reference we may have recourse to a review of the literature on classroom discussion which explicitly excludes consideration of recitation-type interactions (Gall & Gall, 1976). From the language of the authors and of the authorities quoted in this review we will construct a number of generalizations about discussion. Together with a few comments to be added here, these generalizations will serve as a convenient focus for our consideration of classroom discussion.

At the outset it seems safe to say that discussion is a process of engaging students in some activity other than transmitting or exchanging knowledge of a factual or conventional type. The material for discussion is not factual knowlege of itself but its applications, implications, interpretations, and the like. Or the material may be any sort of knowledge brought to bear upon an identified problem, issue, concern. In any event the cognitive processes are typically more complex or "higher" than in recitation. Moreover affective processes are involved either directly or by implication, as when material bears on attitudes, beliefs, opinions, personal experiences and the like. The outcome of discussion cannot generally be known beforehand, nor can any one be prescribed as correct. If the outcome is to be a group product (e.g., a solution), no individual participant is alone

responsible for or capable of producing it. Evaluation is by group consensus. If the outcome is to be an individual product (e.g., an attitude), the group is responsible for contributing to it but each participant must construct an individually suitable one. Evaluation is by individual circumstance. In either case the authority for constructing and evaluating the product lies with participants.

The process of discussion entails--indeed requires--extensive involvement of students individually and collectively; and it suffers either when participants withhold involvement or when their efforts to involve are frustrated. Discussion proceeds by three general activities on the part of individual participants, each activity requiring the cooperation of the group. First, the individual <u>expresses self</u>: states ideas, airs opinions, vents feelings, contributes information, according to the issue at hand. Second, the individual <u>discovers others' viewpoints</u>: their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and the like. Third, the individual <u>shapes self's viewpoint</u>: by becoming more aware of self and others; by understanding and reacting to others' views; by formulating, clarifying and re-evaluating ideas and attitudes; and so forth.

From a pedagogical perspective, discussion serves two further functions. It <u>teaches students discussion skills</u>. And it <u>provides evidence of students' thinking</u>--for the teacher to understand, evaluate, and then plan interventions accordingly. For example, at the most immediate level the teacher hears a student's view and may move to guide it in some way; at a more removed level, the teacher appreciates the class' position and designs an appropriate next lesson.

On all counts mentioned extensive student participation is essential for discussion to succeed. The teacher's participation is also essential but its manner and extent can vary wildly as pedagogue and participant. At the least the teacher's behavior is governed in favor of the counts mentioned: to do everything possible to facilitate these and to avoid doing anything which might inhibit them.

It is fair to say that discussions are not easy to hold and their purposes not easy to achieve, especially to the nth degree. But even to the n-nth degree they seem within uncertain reach. Research on discussion classes reveals that students interact infrequently with other students; that students speak little whether individually or collectively; and that the teacher does most of the talking (Gall & Gall, 1976). In a study of 26 high-school discussion classes (Dillon, 1978b), the teachers spoke at almost every turn of talk, for an average and total time just longer than any and all students. Two out of three teacher utterances were questions.

There are any number of factors which may account for the dearth of discussion in discussion classes. Of these the teacher's use of questions is one factor which alone might account in great part for minimal student expressivity, lack of student-student interaction, and diminished cognitive and affective processes. Moreover, the use of questions probably teaches inappropriate discussion behaviors and ends in severely restrained appreciation of students' state of mind. Conversely, an avoidance or minimal use of questions might contribute a good positive deal on all these counts.

The reason that questions might have such apparently dire effects and their avoidance such apparently magical ones, lies not in their properties as mere interrogative utterances but in their entailments as discourse acts and in their evocation of other classroom processes. Questions initiate a certain kind of verbal exchange, establish a certain kind of social relation, define certain kinds of roles; teachers are especially inclined to ask questions and students especially proficient at answering them; so easily started, question-answer interaction is oddly difficult to terminate and another sort of conversational exchange particularly difficult to introduce. On the other hand it is difficult not to ask questions and it is no simple matter to hold discussions. For both teacher and students it is far easier to engage in question-answer exchanges, leisurely ones this time and about loftier matters than usual.

Rather than argue these beliefs, subsequent pages will spell out their implications for practice. (Related arguments and literature may be found in Dillon, 1978a, 1979b, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c.) Three series of techniques will be recommended, a few under the heading "to question," many more under "not to question," and the remainder under "alternatives to questioning." Each suggestion is followed by a few comments giving some of the rationale and flavor of usage.

To Question

The sole recommendation is <u>to ask a question only when you personally are perplexed and need the information in answer</u>.

That is peculiarly difficult to do. By far the majority of questions both in classrooms and without are put with other intents. It may be especially difficult for a teacher in that a "perplexity" question exposes ignorance, confusion and need, ordinarily not the action of an authoritative, self-sufficient, knowledgeable personage. Yet it is neither inappropriate nor uncommon to experience perplexity during the course of a discussion. Expressing that kind of question models appropriate question-asking behavior during discussions. In that way discussions might tend to become more genuine and more inquiry-oriented. Properties and conditions of questions for inquiry have been identified by various logicians and philosophers (e.g., Belnap & Steel, 1967; Clark, 1972; Knight, 1967). Teacher questions constitute the opposite of these in most respects. Standard-inquiry questioners do not know the answer and need/want/desire to know it. They believe and attest the presupposition to their question to be true. They believe that there is at least one true direct answer, and that the respondent knows it or can obtain it and will supply it. Failing one of these points, the question is heard to be put for some non-inquiry purpose (cf. rhetorical, trick, test questions). Therefore the negative recommendation here runs: <u>if not perplexed, do not ask a question</u>. In the absence of all other teacher questions, an occasional inquiry-question would have a powerful effect on discussion processes.

No other recommendations are to be made under this rubric. If this single type of question were to be practiced discussion would register a great advance. But three other uses of questions may be

specified in a permissive way, lest this list appear niggardly by comparison with the fulsome anti-questioning advice to follow. These three are mechanical uses of questions as procedural devices.

Questions may be put to define the issue, as in posing the question for discussion. This is an interrogative but non-interrogatory formulation of a question at the start and end of discussion and at mid-point as a summary, re-direction or clarification of the issue. No one takes these utterances as anything but foci for topical comments.

Like any other participant, the teacher may use questions to ensure hearing rightly. "I'm sorry, what did you say?" - "Who was it that mentioned X a moment ago?"

Finally, the teacher may revert to questioning in order to regain control of the class. There are other techniques to save faltering or wandering discussion. But if things or people just get out of hand, teacher questioning is an effective means to get them under control--it elicits attention, directs effort, specifies content, demands response, and so forth. Questioners are always the boss. We are far from the delicacies of educative intent here, and this suggestion does not relate to discussion processes. The suggestion relates to the teacher's grip on the class and it reveals the effectiveness of questions as means of social and verbal control. This attractive feature may account in part for the predominant use which teachers make of questions, rather than for their supposedly stimulating effect on student thought and discussion.

Not to Question

By contrast to the one lone use of questions recommended, ten non-uses will be urged. Each promises to facilitate discussion. Although they are phrased negatively, their practice requires positive effort and active behavior, not mere absence of behavior. That is, they are techniques. Two behaviors are necessary, an active non-use of questions and a use of an alternative; the non-use technique removes negative effects on discussion and the alternative technique produces positive effects.

1. Not to question <u>at your every or every other turn at talk</u>. This is a general caveat, since the teacher at all times has the right to talk and always has a turn at talk. After a student has spoken, the teacher may feel that the appropriate thing to occur is for him/her to say something, and this something is more times than not a question. When the teacher has previously posed a question, the chances are demonstrably greater than two to one that he/she will ask another question after the student responds (Mishler, 1975a). Immediately there ensues a question-answer-question series and the question-answer relationship is off and running, leaving discussion in its traces. Furthermore, it is impossible for student-student interaction to occur in this circumstance. As usual, all student talk will be directed to the teacher instead of to the group, and no other student will have the chance to contribute in any event, whether to the previous student or to the teacher. A special juncture must be found and special permission won.

Classroom and everyday discussions differ markedly on the matter of turn-taking. In everyday discourse three options apply: current speaker selects next speaker or, failing that, other speakers select self or, failing that, current speaker selects self (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). The last two options are rare in classrooms and the first only half-present; there the options are made over into turn-allocation procedures (Mehan, 1979) whereby the teacher, whether current speaker or not, always selects the next speaker, either self or student. Sensitivity to these differences may induce the teacher to encourage more student participation simply by not taking the turn but above all by not asking a question. Speaker and topic are not negotiable in classroom discourse as in everyday situations; students cannot "take" the floor nor can they influence the topic and direction of conversation. When the teacher does allocate the floor, he/she almost invariably takes it back after the student has spoken. That is all the more the case when the teacher has asked a question, since a questioner enjoys the reserved right to speak again. In everyday discourse, a questioner replies with an acknowledgement of the answer; the teacher, with an evaluation and further question. In other discussions, participants enjoy equal status and equal rights to gain the floor and to determine the topic (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). While acknowledging the unequal status of classroom participants, the teacher may yet exercise a certain restraint in taking every turn or in using it to pose a question.

Positive restraint is incumbent upon the teacher, as students realize perfectly well that it is ever the teacher's turn to talk;

they will expect the teacher to take his/her turn; and they can anticipate the likelihood of a question. Only by deliberately not asking a question will the teacher leave the juncture open to a student to gain the floor, thereby encouraging eventual participation at the same time as modeling one appropriate discussion behavior. Thus it can be seen that in activity, function, effort and effect, "not to question" constitutes a positive behavior, not mere absence of behavior.

2. Not to question <u>when a student pauses, falters or has ostensibly finished speaking</u>. This appears to be a turn-taking juncture but the turn should not be taken, as in all likelihood the student has actually not finished speaking. Nonetheless students will probably expect the teacher to come in fast with a question. Part of the reason is the pace of ordinary classroom discourse: less than a single second elapses after the student's last syllable before the teacher's next question (Rowe, 1974). This is just short of the lapse between the changing of the traffic light to green and the honking of the taxi behind you.

Most student talk has been conditioned to staccato bursts of one or a mere few seconds' duration, punctuated at each end by a teacher's question. But in discussion periods all theoretical signs point to the need for sustained expression of student thought. Time must be given for that. Time is needful because of the finding that the act of expressing complex thought, personal opinions, interpretations and the like requires more absolute real time than to utter factual knowledge, recount events, give descriptions, and the like; moreover, expression of the former is characterized by pauses and other

hesitations occurring more frequently and for longer periods (see review by Rochester, 1973). For these reasons of conditioning and necessity it can be expected that student contributions will be formed of fragments separated--if left uninterrupted--by pauses and hesitations. In addition, students can be expected to falter as well as to pause while speaking. Their remarks are expectedly to be found lacking in fluency, coherence, and cogency, for two further reasons: students have not the long experience and practice with uttering complex thoughts aloud in public; and they have not had long opportunity to fashion their views, to support and integrate them, puzzle out their implications and so forth, on certain issues and on suddenly-presented issues. That is in part what they are in school for and what the class is a discussion for. On all counts then, the appropriate pedagogical behavior is not to rush in with a question, even after a longish pause.

Such restraint is also appropriate discussion behavior, as the teacher will be modeling due attentiveness and listening until such time as a participant has succeeded in expressing his/her entire thought--not just an entire phrase or even a sentence or two. To speak up at the first second's pause or on the first flawed phrase is merely to grab the floor and to discount the speaker's contribution: no less an interruption than when someone is speaking. Indeed, someone <u>is</u> speaking.

It may however be thought that to put a judicious question at such a juncture would be a helpful thing to do, in an effort to assist the speaker to deliver himself of a stalled thought. This beneficent

question will likely not have a good effect. In the first place it is nonetheless an interruption, an impatience, a refusal to hear someone out save when well and fleetly versed. In the second place it substitutes your concern, guess and/or directive for the particular thoughts which the speaker is endeavoring to gather and to formulate and to express. In eight cases out of ten your question will overshoot the mark and confound the speaker--already confused enough. Struggling with his own thoughts and feelings, concentrating on how to communicate them, he suddenly hears an intrusive question directing him to a strange topic and requiring of him some kind of answer, even for politeness' sake. He must therefore disengage from his struggle and displace his thoughts; he de-concentrates to attend to your concern, to examine your topic, and to search his mind for an answer satisfactory to you. That cannot ordinarily be experienced as helpful. It does not appear to facilitate either thought or expression. More helpful would be to hear the student out.

3. Not to question <u>in an attempt to "draw out" an individual student who is "not participating."</u> By contrast to the hesitant is the taciturn student. It is a truism that the silent student might well be participating, even intensely. And it is true that a question will meet with some response. But the question will probably not elicit the student's thinking, not encourage participation and not teach model behavior in discussion. Although education manuals recommend this technique (e.g., Carin & Sund, 1971), little can be found to recommend it. An authority on non-school group discussion cites five reasons against asking a question of someone who is not speaking:

- the question may threaten the individual;
- he/she may have nothing worthwhile to contribute at the moment;
- others will wonder why this individual was picked out for special treatment;
- the questioner's behavior suggests that spontaneous contributions are not in order;
- the technique causes participants to be ready with a response in case called upon, rather than to think about the problem under discussion. (Maier, 1963, p. 116)

The procedure oddly implies that students should not spend their time listening to the discussion, pondering its implications and puzzling out their own view, then contributing it when ready and relevant. If all other things are going well enough in the discussion, the silent individual might well contribute views in due time--when clear enough about them, when venturesome enough to speak them aloud, and when they seem related to the course of discussion. Directing a person to speak up will have the effect of intimidating that person and others from making an eventual contribution. One need only imagine the evaluative reactions and follow-up questions to a somewhat forced contribution which promises to appear rather contrived or embarrassed, not too well thought out, or plainly irrelevant; and all the worse for "I don't know." It is an awkward affair. Far from drawing out an individual, the question may cause him to withdraw and everyone else to be on guard.

4. Not to question in an attempt to probe or to find out the feelings and other personal involvement of a student. Somewhat in the vein as the preceding example, such a use of questions produces several unproductive side-effects and is counter-productive to its very intent. Other practitioners advise that it is not conducive to finding out how participants feel (Maier, 1963) and in fact restricts the chances of a true expression of feeling (Arbuckle, 1950). Far from involving the individual, probing questions are said to drive the interviewee away (Weinland & Gross, 1952) and to be resented, feared and resisted by the analysand (Olinick, 1954). Expressing feelings, opinions, and other personally-related information in public is a risky enough venture for many people. Asking a question to get at them appears not only indelicate but inept behavior. Perhaps the teacher might wish to expose his/her own personal feelings, experiences, opinions on the issue, then hear the more ready or venturesome students speak. As for the others, they may or may not eventually speak. The discussion will have had a beneficial effect on them whatever--but a ruesome effect if filled with probing questions.

5. Not to question in order to "make a point." The point may be made straightforwardly by declaring it. In that way the student can immediately apprehend the point and respond directly to it, rather than trying to figure out what the point of the question is. The result is more forthright and economical discussion behavior. At times a question is put to score a point. Apart from inefficiency and guile this behavior appears not conducive to educative purposes, howsoever effective as a manoeuver in debate. Of related character are

rhetorical questions, those put in the expectation that no answer be given; ordinarily the answer is either implied in the structure of the question or is supplied forthwith by the questioner. Hence they obviate not stimulate thought and response. In effect they are devices for carrying on a conversation with someone all the while speaking his part. They seem pointless in discussion.

6. Not to question in reply to a student's question. Counter-questions readily savor of polemic. Even with amiable intent the teacher's counter-question can have inimical effects. For one, it may discourage further student questions. For another, it models inappropriate discussion behavior. A counter-question has the force of rejecting student initiative; of refusing to the student the right to ask questions; of withholding cooperation in the exchange; and of wresting control of the interchange away from the student, reassigning it to the teacher. Now the student must answer the teacher's question. As the original question arose out of a student's effort to formulate perplexing thoughts, the counter-question ignores and confounds student thinking. A more educative response and one more conducive to discussion would be to reflect on the question and to appreciate the state of mind it expresses. At the last the teacher can attempt an answer. Discussion then proceeds apace, with the teacher as a model participant who will answer as well as ask questions, who will attend to concerns as well as express them--someone who will join in inquiry.

7. Not to question in an attempt to elicit from a student the (pre-question) thought which has occurred to your mind. This

cumbersome piece of advice refers to a common occurrence in discussion. In recitation teachers put questions in order to elicit the (not an) answer which they have in mind aforehand. In discussion they may tend to put a question in an effort to get the student to respond with the thought which is on the teacher's mind. This is the thought which has occurred to the teacher during the student's contribution. Rather than declare the thought, the teacher formulates a question intended to get the student to declare that thought.

In illustration, suppose a social studies class is discussing the issue of U.S. imports and balance of payments. A student is speaking about the price of tea in China. The thought occurs to the teacher that the U.S. does not import any tea from China but only from India. The teacher then utters: "How much tea did we import from China last year, John?" or "Where do we get most of our tea from, John?" John must now disengage from his own thoughts and abandon all hope of making whatever point he was building towards, in favor of setting about to devine the thought which the teacher has in mind--all the while wondering what does that have to do with the price of tea in China? No one will ever know what John's point might have turned out to be, silly or subtle. The participants are now turned toward an interesting matching game in which John's point, whatever it was, is irrelevant and the teacher's thought, whatever it is, is hidden. Perhaps John will guess it on the third try, perhaps the first. But until the match is made and the teacher's point won, discussion stalls.

Rather than go through such a business, the teacher can straightforwardly declare the thought in mind, permitting John and

others the opportunity to examine it, to incorporate it into their own thinking, or to reject it. Discussion then proceeds apace, with each participant directly revealing and directly addressing the expressed thoughts of the other. By contrast, uttering a question deroutes thought and discussion and it betokens inappropriate participant attitudes. It says: "I will not tell you what I am thinking." To practice this technique, one must be sensitive to the utter immediacy with which a pedagogical question suggests itself hard upon a non-question thought. The connection must be broken and the thought spoken.

8. Not to question <u>by means of a why question</u>. Why not? "Why" is perhaps the most common interrogative word and appears especially to recommend itself in a discussion where people engage in "higher-cognitive" processes, problem solving, opinion-forming, and the like. Nonetheless it is the most imprecise interrogative word available and the most inimical to expression of thought.

It is difficult to formulate a precise why-question in view of the fact that numerous unspecified events may count as an answer--a cause, reason, motive, justification, process, genesis, etc. Which of these is the "why" that the questioner is seeking? Often enough several answers need to be profferred and discounted and several further questions put before the proper kind of event is discovered to satisfy the questioner's intent. But by far the intent of most why-questioners is not to seek an answer at all, nor even to ask a question. By convention most why-questions function to express such things as objections, disapproval, criticism; and the reaction is to

defend, withdraw or attack (Benjamin, 1974). Over some years of experience with adults' why-questions, children "have discovered that there is no meaningful reply to the question and that none is, in fact, anticipated" (p. 81).

In structural terms, the presupposition to a why-question about X runs something like: "There is some compelling reason for X and I do not know it." It is difficult to formulate such a why-question, even if wonderfully precise, because ordinarily we react to a person's X-idea by thinking something like: "I know the reason for X and it is wrong." When we react to a student's contribution by means of a why-question we risk communicating not the structural presupposition but the functional one. In effect we say or are heard to say: "You are stupid to think/feel/say X." That may indeed be the case. Yet as educators we might discover some more helpful thought to communicate in some more helpful way; for example, we could utter our own understanding of the X-related case. To use a why-question seems to encourage neither the student's cognitive nor affective nor expressive processes.

Proof of the function of most why-questions emerges when someone mis-hears one as a request for why-type information. If the student responds to the formal terms of the question, the exchange sounds odd (much like an answer to a rhetorical question), and the student will surely lose something in the bargain. Let us suppose that Joan actually embarks upon a true explanation of her own thinking. A true explanation is not what is wanted and will be sanctioned. Fellow students will perceive that she does not know how to deal

appropriately with a why-question (viz., to defend, to mitigate, to retract or to concede). The questioner will either hear her account with irritation or take it up only to refute it, invariably going on to make his own point, which was the purpose of the question to begin with. On that account it seems more appropriate discussion behavior to express one's point at the outset. That saves everyone from a messy interchange, mangled feelings, mis-communications and subsequent dispirited participation.

On occasion a sincere why-question occurs to the mind. There is no objection to uttering it if the teacher can so dispose that the student hear it as a sincere why-question. That is a feat. It may require that the group have long and positive experience with satisfying discussions and the teacher considerable experience with not asking questions, especially why-questions.

9. Not to question at the start of discussion or near the beginning of a new course. The principal reasons are the ease with which participants fall into a question-answer relationship and the arduousness of establishing a discussion situation. By deliberately restraining the impulse to ask questions, the teacher lets out that a new situation is being defined, one in which students must take some of the initiative and responsibility for expressing thoughts and sustaining discussion. No one is foolish enough to believe that when the teacher starts in with the questions. Even if the group has been drawn up into a discussion circle, everyone still knows what's really going on. They will behave accordingly, and with good reason. There is no reason to expect discussion behavior to emerge eventually.

Questions should not be used to get a discussion going because they actually forestall discussion and get something else going.

10. Not to question in hopes of stimulating student thought and discussion. Questions have not been shown to do that; probably do not do it; and possibly may do the opposite (Dillon, 1978a, 1981c). To achieve these ends alternative techniques are more promising.

Alternatives to Questioning

Seven alternatives to questioning can be recommended for use at a particular juncture in the discourse. Let us suppose that the teacher has said something--even asked a question--and a student has just said something in turn. At that juncture, instead of asking a question the teacher may choose one or another of these techniques. Each is designed to stimulate further student thought and discussion, and to teach appropriate discussion behavior. (Details of most techniques, together with some justification in research and practice, may be found in Dillon, 1979a.)

1. declarative statement. Instead of asking a question, express your state of mind by declaring your thought, opinion, feeling, experience in relation to the previous speaker's contribution or the issue under discussion. The statement in mind is that one which immediately precedes a question, the pre-question thought. Contrary to what might be supposed, declarative statements are indeed responded to and can be expected to receive longer and more complex responses than questions (see Colby, 1961).

2. reflective re-statement. Summarize your understanding of what the previous speaker has just said. The effect is to signal to

everyone the importance of listening carefully to someone's contribution and the difficulty of appreciating it rightly--especially before reacting to it or, worse, ignoring it. The re-statement also gives the speaker an opportunity--invariably taken--to clarify or elaborate, properly inferring that what he thinks matters some. The result is to encourage participation as well as to facilitate discussion of real rather than imagined meanings.

3. declaration of perplexity. If in truth you are perplexed, so inform the student by means of a mixed declarative-interrogative phrasing (cf. "indirect question"). "I'm confused about what you're saying." - "I was just thinking about whether that would make any difference." - "I'm trying to remember if X or Y is the case." - "I wonder what happens under those conditions." It is useless to tiptoe around with such phrases if they do not reflect your state of mind; and as useless to ask a question, for you are in no condition to ask one.

4. invitation to elaborate. If in truth you would like to hear more of the student's views, say: "I'd like to hear more of your views on that." The request can be phrased as a mixed declarative-imperative (cf. "softened imperative"). "Perhaps you could give an example to help us understand." - "I'd be interested to know the reasons behind that." Such delicacies of phrase are more inviting than "Define your terms!" - "Why do you think something like that?"

5. class questions. By various means, permit and invite students to raise a question about their classmate's last contribution or about the issue at hand. Responses of students to a student

question are both longer and more complex than to a teacher's question (Mishler, 1978). Hence to evoke student questions has the effects of encouraging inquiry, of enhancing discussion, and of promoting student-student interaction. By contrast, the more the teacher asks questions, the fewer questions will students put (Susskind, 1969), and the shorter and simpler do responses become; while student-student interaction and voluntary contributions disappear as everyone begins to talk only to the teacher and only when asked.

6. speaker's question. When a student is confused or is having difficulty expressing self, let that speaker formulate a question. That way the speaker gets precisely the needed help or provides a new question for all to consider. By contrast, if the teacher starts in with a series of so-called "diagnostic" questions, the discussion muddles ever more and the student's thinking becomes even more confounded in an inevitably protracted, distracting hit-or-miss exchange ("Do you mean this? Do you mean that? What are you trying to say? What is the price of tea in China?").

7. deliberate silence. Say nothing at all. This is the most intriguing technique and one of the most effective. It is the simplest yet hardest to practice. When a student stops at the (ostensible) end of his/her remarks, maintain a deliberate, attentive silence for 3-5 seconds (perhaps with a murmur and nod or two). Once everyone has become accustomed to such odd teacher behavior, invariably the original speaker will resume or another will enter in. Not only will the contribution therefore become longer, it will almost certainly exhibit more complex thinking. Hence the teacher's deliberate use of silence can encourage student participation, thought and response.

The reason, in brief, is that children pause longer and more frequently while explaining or interpreting than while describing or recounting (e.g., Levin, Silverman & Ford, 1967). The teacher's question at that juncture serves only to inhibit the forthcoming expression of higher thought. The reason for the 3-5 seconds of teacher silence lies not only in the length of such pauses but also in the habituated pace of classroom interaction (less than a second's lapse from student speech to teacher's next question); students need to be sure that the teacher intends not to speak. The reason that this technique is so arduous lies in the awesome duration which five classroom seconds feels like and in the teacher's impulse to speak, especially to question, for fear that student response will otherwise not occur. Like a teacher, an interviewer feels responsible for the talk and commonly fears

> that he will not be able to maintain a continuous flow of verbal interchange. In his anxiety to keep the question-answer process moving, he may perceive any pause or silence as a threat and a danger signal to be disposed of as quickly as possible by introducing another question (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965, p. 203).

This feeling is all the more worrisome in group situations and all the more burdensome in classrooms, since teachers are charged with responsibility for educationally beneficial discourse among young people. All that can be said is to reassure those who mistrust silence that the silence technique ought to work, for the reasons given, and has proven to work even in classrooms (Rowe, 1974). Moreover, during

periods of discussion other participants are supposed to assume some of the responsibility for encouraging and maintaining discussion. The teacher's occasional silence encourages the original speaker to resume or other students to contribute. By contrast, the teacher's question at that juncture only closes the floor and forestalls expression of thought.

Conclusion

In general, the questioning behaviors appropriate to discussion and to other classroom interaction are reversed. In favor of discussion, teachers are urged to put questions sparingly if at all, and only when perplexed. At the juncture where a student has finished speaking, they are urged not to use ten specified questioning behaviors and instead to use seven alternatives to questioning.

Practiced together, these recommendations appear more likely to facilitate discussion than do the contrary questioning behaviors. The argument is of the form: "Given discussion purpose D, questions will not achieve D and may produce anti-D, whereas non-questioning alternative techniques will succeed in D and forestall anti-D." Teachers also ask questions for control purposes C at the same time as for D purposes. Alternative techniques can achieve the substance of C along with D, without the regrettable side-effects and anti-effects resulting from the use of questions: dependent, reactive participants; limited and nonexpressive responses; slippage into polemic, defensiveness, disputation and guardedness, debate and point-counterpoint, spectatorship and status contests. When discussion falters it is easy to step in with questions. But oddly enough, stepping up the questions results in losing the discussion.

The recommended techniques also promise to achieve two pedagogical functions of discussions. Together they constitute a model of discussion skills for students to imitate: listening, respecting and understanding others' contributions, speaking one's true mind, encouraging others to speak, joining in inquiry. Together they yield greater and more reliable evidence for the teacher's appreciation of students' state of mind and for planning subsequent interventions. By contrast, questioning techniques teach anti-discussion skills and yield limited evidence of students' thinking.

Contrary to widespread pedagogical belief and practice, it has been argued that the use of questions does not facilitate discussion and may actively foil it. Alternative non-questioning techniques seem more promising to achieve those ends of discussion for which questions are mistakenly and often fruitlessly put. Empirical evidence to sustain either this argument or that practice is needed. The recommended techniques might usefully be taken up both in research and in practice.

References

Arbuckle, D. S. Teacher counseling. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1950.

Belnap, N. D. & Steel, T. B. The logic of questions and answers. New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1976.

Benjamin, A. The helping interview (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Carin, A. A. & Sund, R. B. Developing questioning techniques: A self-concept approach. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1971.

Clark, M. Perplexity and knowledge: An inquiry into the structures of questioning. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972.

Colby, K. M. On the greater amplifying power of causal-correlative over interrogative inputs on free association in an experimental psychoanalytic situation. Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 1961, 133, 233-239.

Dillon, J. T. Using questions to depress student thought. School Review, 1978, 87, 50-63. (a)

Dillon, J. T. Duration of response to teacher questions and statements during periods of class discussion. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978. (version with same title in Contemporary Educational Psychology, 1981, 6, .) (b)

Dillon, J. T. Alternatives to questioning. High School Journal, 1979, 62, 217-222. (a)

Dillon, J. T. Defects of questioning as an interview technique. Psychology in the Schools, 1979, 16, 575-580. (b)

Dillon, J. T. Curiosity as non sequitur of Socratic questioning.

Journal of Educational Thought, 1980, 14, 17-22.

Dillon, J. T. Paper Chase and the Socratic method of teaching law. Journal of Legal Education, 1981, 31, . (a)

Dillon, J. T. Categories of literature on questioning in various enterprises: An introduction and bibliography. Language Sciences, 1981, 3, . (b)

Dillon, J. T. Effect of questions posed by teachers and other practitioners. Submitted for publication, 1981. (c)

Drake, J. D. Interviewing for managers. New York: American Management Association, 1972.

Gall, M. D. The use of questions in teaching. Review of Educational Research, 1970, 40, 707-721.

Gall, M. D. & Gall, J. P. The discussion method. In N. L. Gage (Ed.), The psychology of teaching methods. NSSE 75th Yearbook, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976.

Knight, T. S. Questions and universals. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 1967, 27, 564-576.

Levin, H., Silverman, I., & Ford, B. L. Hesitations in children's speech during explanation and description. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 1967, 6, 560-564.

Maier, N. R. F. Problem-solving discussions and conferences: Leadership methods and skills. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

Mehan, H. Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1979.

Mishler, E. G. Studies in dialogue and discourse: I. An exponential

law of successive questioning. Language in Society, 1975, 4, 31-51. (a)

Mishler, E. G. Studies in dialogue and discourse: II. Types of discourse initiated by and sustained through questioning. Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 1975, 4, 99-121. (b)

Mishler, E. G. Studies in dialogue and discourse: III. Utterance structure and utterance function in interrogative sequences. Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 1978, 7, 279-305.

Olinick, S. L. Some considerations of the use of questioning as a psychoanalytic technique. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 1957, 5, 302-324.

Richardson, S. A., Dohrenwend, B. S., & Klein, D. Interviewing: Its forms and functions. New York: Basic Books, 1965.

Rochester, S. R. The significance of pauses in spontaneous speech. Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 1973, 2, 51-81.

Rowe, M. B. Pausing phenomena: Influence on the quality of instruction. Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 1974, 3, 203-233.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A. & Jefferson, G. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. Language, 1974, 50, 696-735.

Sinclair, J. M. & Coulthard, R. M. Towards an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils. London: Oxford, 1975.

Susskind, E. The role of question-asking in the elementary school classroom. In F. Kaplan & S. B. Sarason (Eds.), The psycho-educational clinic. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University

Department of Psychology and Massachusetts Department of Public Health Monograph Series No. 4, 1969.

Weinland, J. D. & Gross, M. V. Personnel interviewing. New York: Ronald Press, 1952.

To Question and Not to Question During Discussion
AERA Annual Meeting, April 1981

J.T. Dillon
Univ. of California
Riverside, CA 92521

TO QUESTION	NOT TO QUESTION	ALTERNATIVES TO QUESTIONING
1. when you personally are perplexed & need the information Procedural uses 2. to define the issue for discussion, e.g., at the start to "pose the question" or at mid-point to "clarify the question." 3. to ensure hearing rightly, e.g., "I'm sorry, what did you say?" 4. to regain control of the class when things get out of hand.	1. at your every or every other turn at talk. 2. when a student pauses, falters, or has ostensibly finished speaking. 3. in an attempt to "draw out" an individual student who is "not participating." 4. in an attempt to probe or find out the feelings & other personal involvement of a student. 5. in order to "make a point." 6. in reply to a student's question. 7. in an attempt to elicit from a student the (prequestion) thought which has occurred to your mind. 8. by means of a why-question. 9. at the start of discussion or near the beginning of a course. 10. in hopes of stimulating student thought & discussion.	1. declarative statement- express your own state of mind, your thought, opinion, etc. 2. reflective re-statement- summarize your understanding of what the speaker has said. 3. declaration of perplexity- if perplexed, so inform the student by a mixed declarative-interrogative phrasing (cf. "indirect question"). 4. invitation to elaborate- if wishing to hear more, so invite the student by a mixed declarative-imperative phrasing (cf. "softened imperative"). 5. class questions- invite or permit students to raise a question about their classmate's contribution, or on the issue at hand. 6. speaker's question- when a student has confusion or difficulty making self understood, encourage that speaker to formulate a question. 7. deliberate silence- say nothing at all but maintain an attentive silence during 3-5 secs (perhaps murmuring or nodding) until the original speaker resumes or another student enters in.